



CPSMA

Catholic Primary Schools Management Association

Consultation on the Strategy for Education and Skills 2016 – 2018

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How well does the Education service meet the needs of children and students?

What improvements can be made within existing resources?

The development of responsive models of support, which incorporate review instruments that will ensure that the existing resources are deployed to prevailing and emerging needs. Considerable work has been done in this regard in relation to Special Educational Needs [NCSE Working Group Report – Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs – A better and more equitable way] and to Educational Disadvantage [DEIS Review in progress].

The same model should be applied to In School Management provision. This is being addressed under “existing resources” and “new provision”. For the past seven years, thousands of promoted posts have been lost and the burden on school management, and school principals in particular, has grown exponentially, as teachers retire and new initiatives are introduced. The limited alleviation, whilst welcomed, was granted under the existing “non-responsive” model of allocation, i.e. based on a schedule of teaching posts.

What improvements can be made through new provision?

In School Management:

As well as reinstating the pre – 2009 In School Management provision, additional management support should be allocated to schools that establish and operate special classes and ASD units, and who employ and manage high numbers of non- teaching staff (Special Needs Assistants, Bus Escorts etc.).

Capitation Funding:

As set out in the CPSMA Budget submission, schools are still struggling with the Capitation Grant reduction that was introduced in Budget 2012, amounting to a 5% cut over the last three years. Since 2010, there has been a reduction of €30 per pupil – a staggering 15%. The expectation that schools can survive on a capitation grant of less than one euro per pupil per school day is untenable. There is no doubt that this shortfall is contributing to the contentious issue of “Voluntary Contributions” being not just sought, but necessary.

The proposal to set out capitation rates to schools on a rolling three year basis is of little benefit if the annual grant does not meet the needs of the school.

Ancillary Services Funding:

In relation to Ancillary Services funding, whilst this year's increase was welcomed, it had no "net" benefit to a school's "common grant", as it transferred directly to current employees of the Board of Management.

Ancillary Grant funding should be increased significantly so that all schools, particularly small schools, can have adequate secretarial and caretaking support.

Other improvements are referenced under the individual headings of this submission.

Comment on work currently being undertaken by the Department in your area of interest and/or expertise. (What are we doing well, what could we do better)?

As a School Management body, CPSMA liaises with the Department of Education and Skills on a broad range of issues and wishes to acknowledge the Department's ongoing support and willingness to engage in consultation as stakeholders.

Training:

In the recent review of the Constitution of Board of Management/Governance Manual, the importance of Board of Management training was recognised as a key factor in the efficient operation of the Board. To this end, CPSMA acknowledges the Department's investment in Board training and urges additional investment to respond to any emerging training need arising from the government's education strategy – School Admissions legislation, to name but one.

Amalgamation:

If the Government is committed to facilitating small schools who wish to amalgamate, further consultation is required to establish appropriate protocols for this process to ensure that the Boards of Management in question receive the appropriate support – both advisory and financial.

Supporting Financial Governance in Primary Schools:

The Department's proposal to put in place arrangements to strengthen and support the existing financial governance arrangements at primary level is welcomed. CPSMA will look forward to engaging with the relevant stakeholders to bring this proposal to fruition.

Parents' Charter:

CPSMA welcomes the most recent commitment to establish a Parents' Charter and will look forward to contributing to the consultative process that will facilitate its establishment.

Are there opportunities (e.g. new areas of work) which the Department should consider when developing the 2016 - 2018 strategy which would advance the achievement of our mission, vision and objectives across the continuum of education and skills?

Rather than suggesting new areas of work, CPSMA suggests a more cohesive approach – inter-departmental and inter-agency – to addressing the eight “target” areas set out in the government's education strategy. There is a considerable amount of research that complements and informs the collective priority areas. For example, it is impossible to address early years, without taking the educational disadvantage and special educational needs factors into consideration.

How should success on achieving our strategies be measured?

Short term goals are more readily assessed – literacy and numeracy levels, school attendance & school completion. However the long term success of the over-arching objectives will be more difficult to quantify.

Prioritising Early Years

Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

CPSMA fully endorses the proposals set out in respect of early childhood education – particularly the recognition that Junior and Senior Infants in ALL schools should have a more favourable pupil teacher ratio.

Further consideration should be given to the early identification of needs that will require additional educational interventions. This will expedite the process of provision at primary level and ensure that there is continuity of support, particularly when pre-school children move from having their needs addressed by different agencies. Protocols for the transfer of information between pre-school placements and primary schools are essential.

How should progress on Prioritising Early Years be measured?

- Readiness to engage in with the Infant Education Curriculum
- Additional support in place when the pupil commences Primary school

What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Establishment of the Inclusion Support Services as proposed in NCSE Working Group Report – Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs, to identify, address and support pupils at pre-school level.

Supporting parents in their important role as primary educators.

Tackling Disadvantaged

Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

Having participated in the Education Partners Forum on the review of the DEIS programme, CPSMA acknowledges the steps that have been taken by the Department of Education and Skills to make this model of support responsive to the challenges of educational disadvantage.

How should progress on Tackling Disadvantaged be measured?

At Primary level, the DEIS plan sets out clear objectives in terms of numeracy, literacy, attendance etc.

What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

As part of the DEIS review, the Education Partners identified the following issues as priorities:

Identification of schools should be clear, transparent & responsive

Continue/increase funding – sliding scale of supports

Continue reduced PTR & threshold for administrative principals

Extra resources & supports for teachers – prioritise high quality CPD including Leadership – Sabbatical Leave

Guidance Counsellor posts

Continue HSCL & SCP

Access to School Meals & Breakfast Clubs

Wellbeing – Mental Health, SLT, OT & Counselling Supports

Diversity and Choice for Parents

Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

All education partners are committed to greater diversity of provision at primary level. In response to the *Programme for a Partnership Government* it is necessary to put in place a structure of engagement between the DES and the Patrons' representatives. As consultations in local areas continue it becomes clear that the practical problems differ from one place to another. Engagement between the DES and Patrons will be important in attempting to formulate creative responses to complex situations. In all of this it is imperative to reassure local communities that no change will be implemented without widespread support in the area.

There are a variety of ways of supporting greater diversity of provision at primary level. These include the opening of new schools, amalgamations of existing schools and providing alternatives to extending Catholic schools where there is already adequate provision of Catholic schools in an area.

There are problems with the term 'divesting'. It might be better to speak of a reconfiguration of the primary school system to take account of changes in Irish society. The transfer of a living school from one patron to another is implausible given local hostility. The process will only gain momentum through a more energetic approach to amalgamations. DES supports for such amalgamations must be put in place. Church representatives have presented a document to the DES detailing issues that arise in amalgamations under the headings of teaching staff, finances, parents, ancillary staff, local community / parish. It will be important to clarify what supports are in place for school amalgamations.

When agreed protocols are in place for amalgamations it will be much easier to engage local schools/communities about the value of amalgamations in certain areas based on pedagogical and sociological benefits. Schools and communities will also see that a reconfiguration of local schools based on some amalgamations can contribute to the national policy of greater diversity of provision at primary level.

What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

If the objective is to create an education system that reflects the need in modern Ireland for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational education, while also safeguarding the right of parents to send their children to denominational schools that offer a distinct religious ethos, should they so wish, then it is essential that a mechanism is devised to respect this plurality of choice.

Promoting Creativity and Entrepreneurial Capacity in Students

Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The Forum on Entrepreneurship in Schools (DES 2015) acknowledged that there were a number of successful entrepreneurial initiatives in place in primary and post-primary schools.

In trying to achieve a more structured approach to engaging in further initiatives and developing entrepreneurial skills, it is important that the guidelines that issue to schools in this regard, should complement the work already underway, and in no way add to any curricular content.

Continuing investment in technology will be necessary, as well as additional continuous professional development for teachers. An agreed timeline, with the appropriate supports, will be key to the success of this aspect of the educational strategy.

Making Better use of Educational Assets within Communities

Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The commitment to the school capital investment programme is welcomed. In relation to an "annual" application for Minor Works, CPSMA submits that the scope of the Minor Works scheme cannot be limited to a one-off payment of this grant. Improvements to school buildings and grounds are ongoing issues, and dedicated funding for the upkeep of school buildings and equipment is essential, and school management need to be in a position to plan effectively for this ongoing maintenance.

Schools are to be commended for engaging with the provisions of Primary Circular 16/05, "The Sharing of School Facilities with the Community". The use of school buildings for purposes other than education is widespread. Since this circular issued in March 2005, Boards of Management have had to assess their capacity to provide such

a service, in response to emerging difficulties. The use of the school building for the pre - school provision, for example, brings with it an obligation to ensure that the facility is compliant with regulations that flow from the Child Care Act 2009, particularly in relation to insurance.

It is an established fact that the school premises cannot be used by other groups without the consent of the Patron/Trustees. With this in mind, if the current provision for the use of school buildings is to be expanded, it will require consultation with the Patron/Trustees and other stakeholders to ensure that appropriate protocols are put in place.

Any expansion of the current scheme should not incur any additional administrative burden on school staff and school management.

Special Needs Education

Comment on the approach contained in the Programme for a Partnership Government (are we capturing the essential issues, are there additional matters we should take into account).

The NCSE undertook a comprehensive, strategic review of special education supports in schools and published its findings in a policy advice paper in May 2013. A clear finding was that the EPSEN Act 2004 still represented the most effective blueprint for delivering resources to pupils with special educational needs through its emphasis on individualised assessment processes, educational planning and monitoring of student outcomes.

The working group established to review the model of delivery of Special Educational Needs Support, made 30 recommendations - many of which were incorporated into the pilot model (School year 2015/2016).

This body of research should form the foundation for future special education access and provision. We look forward to the evaluation of the pilot model.

The recognition of the impact of Speech and Language difficulties on children's social and educational development, and the proposal for in-school Speech and Language therapy is also welcomed.

In piloting these new initiatives, it is important that inter agency protocols are clearly established, so that the benefit of the provision is not compromised in any way. Current advisory and intervention supports available to schools are provided by a number of different bodies and organisations. To ensure that there is a cohesive approach to the implementation of any new provision, schools should have the support of a unified support service, to facilitate the provision and maximise its potential.

How should progress on Special Needs Education be measured?

Given the complex nature of Special Educational Needs provision, measurement of progress should be multi-faceted: earlier intervention, access to appropriate services, inter agency co-operation, CPD for relevant professionals, further education opportunities.

What would you consider to be the priority actions and outcomes in this area?

Whilst it is difficult to prioritise one aspect of special educational need over another, CPSMA wishes to take this opportunity to highlight an area that has not been specifically mentioned in the educational strategy - challenging behaviour. The provision of training to address challenging behaviour should be prioritised. Although the National Behavioural Support Services provide support for Post Primary schools on issues relating to behaviour, there is a growing need for similar support for primary schools that are experiencing difficulty supporting SEN pupils within the context of the school's Code of Behaviour.

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